



State Representative Michael Scionti

Florida House of Representatives - District 58
Democratic Whip



Committees:

Infrastructure
Homeland Security & Public Safety
Military & Veterans' Affairs
Property Tax Relief & Reform - Joint
Select Committee

Council:

Government Efficiency & Accountability

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Dear Friends and Neighbors:

The 2008 Legislative Session was one of the toughest on record. We began the session with a \$1 billion revenue shortfall for the current fiscal year so the legislature was forced to reduce various programs and services across the state. In fact, to offset some of these reductions, I voluntarily implemented cost-cutting measures in my own district office, which netted a 10 percent savings of tax dollars that were returned to the state. Still, the news of revenue shortfalls and deeper cuts continued. In March, state economists advised we would need to reduce the budget by another \$4 billion.

However, some good initiatives did pass both chambers and are before Governor Crist for his consideration. Sensible and bipartisan public school reforms were passed that will minimize the reliance on the FCAT as the sole factor in grading schools. We also took initial steps to provide health insurance to the 3.8 million Floridians who are currently uninsured. Finally, more smart energy and climate change programs made it out of this legislative session so we can focus our attention on renewable energy sources rather than depending on oil and other nonrenewable energy.

I will continue to keep you updated throughout the summer and fall on information regarding legislation that passed this year. As always, it is a pleasure to serve you in the Florida House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature of Michael Scionti in black ink.

2008 Regular Session Legislation Filed by State Representative Michael Scionti

House Bill 59 — Veterans' Tuition Assistance Act — Requires state universities and community colleges to waive 50 percent of the in-state tuition rate for veterans. This bill was not taken up in the House or Senate because of state budgetary constraints and will likely be filed again for the 2009 Legislative Session.

House Bill 61 — Offenses Against Officers — Provides that person is not justified in using force to resist arrest by law enforcement officers or to resist law enforcement officers executing a legal duty, if officer acts in good faith and is known or reasonably appears to be a law enforcement officer. This bill passed the House by a vote of 115-0 and Senate by a vote of 39-0 and was signed into law by the Governor on May 28, 2008.

House Bill 63 — Growth Management — Authorizes counties and municipalities to use ad valorem tax revenues for law enforcement, fire rescue, or emergency medical services within community redevelopment areas. This bill was not taken up in the House or Senate because of state budgetary constraints and will likely be filed again for the 2009 Legislative Session.

House Bill 929 — Community Contribution Tax Credit — Expands the types of projects eligible for income tax credit to include public broadcasting educational programs such as "Sesame Street" and "Electric Company" and materials related to specified projects. This bill was not taken up in the House or Senate because of state budgetary constraints and will likely be filed again for the 2009 Legislative Session.

2008 - 2009 State Budget Passed at \$66.5 Billion

As this year's legislative session came to a close, leaders in the Florida House and Senate worked diligently to put together a comprehensive spending plan for 2008-2009. Florida's budget crisis dominated the 60 days as we debated spending priorities and what to do with a nearly \$6 billion cut from last year's budget. Unfortunately, the news is not good as healthcare, education, and public safety will see their budgets reduced significantly. For instance, nursing homes took a \$163 million cut, \$53 million was reduced from the developmentally disabled, and every child in our public schools will find their education cut by \$130.

How will school districts absorb the reduction in state dollars? Some will be forced to cut afterschool and summer school programs, reading coaches, security officers, enrichment programs, and raise school lunches. Others may have to close schools, eliminate guidance counselors, shorten teacher contracts, and eliminate middle school athletic programs. In addition, we will also see our public safety significantly diminished as hundreds of positions are cut from our state attorneys, public defenders, and courts. These reductions will make it harder for our criminal justice system to address the rise in crime rates and the increasing demand on our court system.

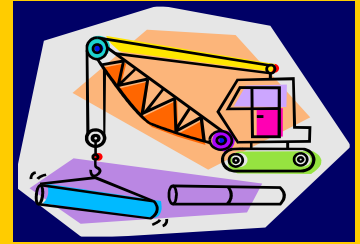
It is because of the spending priorities laid out in the budget and the significant reductions made in healthcare, education, and public safety that I voted against the budget this year.

2008 - 2009 State Budget Appropriations

Sponsored by State Representative Michael Scionti

Drew Park Stormwater Project: \$100,000.00

Funds will be used to upgrade the City of Tampa's stormwater drainage system from large open ditches to more efficient and environmentally friendly drainage systems. This appropriation for Drew Park is in addition to the \$1 million that was sponsored by Representative Scionti and appropriated in last year's state budget.



Joint Military Science Leadership Center: \$200,000.00

Funds will be used to support a national leadership development model that supplements and strengthens the Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) program at the University of South Florida. This program will enhance the quality of reserve officers for the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps through the delivery of leadership skills in a joint strategic military environment as they train to become skilled officers in the Nation's Armed Services.



Legislature says YES to Consumer Protections, but NO to Insurance Rate Reductions.

Following two destructive hurricane seasons in 2004 and 2005 that resulted in nearly \$36 billion in gross losses, the State of Florida still has an extremely unstable and unaffordable property insurance market. Floridians are being squeezed at the gas pumps with record gas prices, unfair property taxes, an ever-increasing cost of living, and the ongoing burden of skyrocketing property insurance premiums.

This year, the legislature unanimously passed Senate Bill 2860 because of good consumer protections in the bill. For example, the bill repeals for a year the practice of insurance companies to increase rates prior to approval by the Office of Insurance Regulation (OIR). The bill also requires insurance companies to notify OIR 90 days before non-renewing more than 10,000 policies in one year. More importantly, the bill mandates that insurance companies cannot drop a customer without a six month notification. Finally, the bill extends the Citizens rate freeze until January 1, 2010.

Sadly, this legislation does not address insurance rate reductions. Besides the one year continuation of the Citizens rate freeze, Floridians will continue to have unbearable insurance premiums. I have heard from many of you that we must lower rates. However, I believe what passed this year will not achieve what many of you had in mind, rate reductions. There are good consumer protections in this measure, but without rate relief, Floridians will continue to be crushed.

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